

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

July 17, 2008

Mark Rey
Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Undersecretary Rey:

We write to express our concerns with U.S. Forest Service appraisals of fees for private cabins on Forest Service land. The Cabin User Fee Fairness Act (CUFFA) passed in 2000 was meant to create a fair appraisal process for cabin owners, but we do not believe that the implementation of CUFFA complies with the intent of the Act. It is our understanding that Senator Craig, who was the original sponsor of this legislation, sent a similar letter to your agency to clarify Congressional intent of the Cabin User Fee Fairness Act, and we join him in requesting a revision of the U.S. Forest Service appraisal process to reflect the true intent of the law.

We respectfully request your attention to adverse impacts suffered by special use permit holders due to inflated appraisal values. The Forest Service's exclusion of some property attributes from consideration in appraisals has caused many cabin lot appraisals to be higher than the market values of such properties should be.

The many regulations and restrictions on U.S. Forest Service cabins should be included in calculation of user fees. Current appraisal protocol does not adequately consider the myriad of restrictions placed on cabin owners that depress market value of cabin lots. The process also does not consider the limited ownership rights held by cabin owners, who do not own the land where their cabins are situated, do not have year-round use of the site, and cannot limit public access to their lots. Restrictions of this type should be considered in each property's appraised value prior to calculating the appropriate fee.

The Recreation Residence Program was created to encourage private stewardship on our public lands. These family cabins have provided multiple generations with a stake in the health of our forests, and their owners are important partners for our public agencies. With the recent significant increases of some special use cabin permit fees, several of these owners have indicated that they can no longer afford to keep their cabins. We are concerned that responsible cabin owners with multi-generational ties to their respective areas may simply be replaced by wealthier, vacation home buyers better able to afford high costs.

The Cabin User Fee Fairness Act was intended to keep families in their cabins by ensuring that fees remained reasonable, through a fair appraisal process. We request immediate action by the U.S. Forest Service to adhere to this congressional intent. We ask that your agency update its appraisal protocol for special use cabin permits. This action is necessary to alleviate the negative impacts faced by forest cabin owners across the country and prevent the removal of countless private stewards from our public lands.

Sincerely,

John Bagnasso
Mike Singer

Mike Enji

Mike Croyo

Maria Carbone

Jenny Reiberg

Doug Weller

Jon Testa
Chita

M. W.

Pete Dominin

My Bances

Barbara Cubin